

TESTIMONY FOR THE FEBRUARY 21, 2017, APPROPRIATIONS ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE

February 21, 2017

Dear Senator Cathy Osten, Sen. Paul Formica, Rep. Toni Walker, Ranking Member Melissa Ziobron, Subcommittee Chairwoman Gayle Slossberg, and Chairman Chris Rosario:

My name is Bill Stover, Director of Family & Community Partnerships for the Windham Public School system. I am a resident of the Town of Columbia and tax payer of the State of Connecticut. I am providing this testimony on behalf of hundreds of children who are presently in our before & after School programs in Windham.

Here is some information with regard to our programs:

- We currently are serving 312 elementary students from 237 families in our 5 afterschool programs. We have waiting lists at all our sites.
- Serving over 225 families means that these parents (almost all of whom are working) know their children are in a safe, adult supervised environment, getting assistance with their homework, getting physical exercise, receiving a healthy snack, and being actively engaged in positive learning experiences. All parents pay a fee based on their income on a sliding fee scale. Without these programs, they could not afford other childcare programs, meaning their children would be coming home after the regular school day without needed supervision until their parents come home from work.
- Over 80 of our students enrolled in the homeless outreach program are offered free enrollment in our afterschool programs to ensure their safety and keep them from falling behind in their school work. Any child identified as homeless is immediately accepted into the afterschool program.
- We currently have 23 tutorial groups totaling over 110, K-5 students in the 5 elementary schools. Each of these [small learning groups \(5-6 students\)](#) meet twice a week for 1.5 hours. They are led by a certified teacher, who assists with the students' homework and then teaches skill based activities to increase their capabilities in math, literacy, etc. Data shows that these students make significant improvement in their classes.
- At each of these schools, there is a Big Brother Big Sister Mentoring Program one [day a week](#). This gives our elementary students the opportunity to spend quality mentoring time with college-aged mentors from UCONN. [At present, we have nearly 100 matches.](#)
- We host Grow Windham, an organization that provides education on healthy eating habits and gardening for all of the students that we work with. Small gardens have been created and are maintained by the afterschool students.
- Through a partnership with the Windham Recreation Department, we offer ballroom dance courses for our afterschool students. Each school also uses the Rec Dept. gym and pool during the school year.
- ECSU volunteers come to support our students and offer learning enrichment activities during program time at least twice a week at each of our sites. (Over 200 volunteers are sent to us each year in collaboration with Center For Community Engagement at ECSU.
- Natchaug School, which is viewed as the neediest of our elementary schools, also receives over 20 volunteers from UCONN each week. This ongoing program is called the Homework Club.

- At Sweeney School we have a program called Connecticut Fitness and Nutrition Clubs In Motion. It is a 4-h based curriculum supported by UCONN's Department of Extension and serves students in Grades 3-5.
- At Natchaug School we have a program called the United Way Reading Program. Mentors work one-on-one with a student for an hour. They read together and do educational activities, helping students to improve their overall reading skills, and gain confidence in sounding out words and vocabulary.
- At Windham Center School we host a program called Ballet Folklorico. It teaches students about their own culture and traditions, and also helps to increase their awareness of diversity. Students create artwork, learn dances and music and study a variety of cultures before culminating with a presentation at the end of the school year.
- All of our programs take students on at least two educational field trips throughout the school year.
- We host 4 family events a year at each school to showcase the talents of our students so that parents can see all that is available to their children through our programs. All are well attended by parents and other family members. For example, North Windham had over 40 parents, relatives and friends attend their Hispanic Heritage Night on October 28th. Natchaug had over 30 attend their Science Night on October 21st. STEM Academy had 60 attend their Talent Show on October 18th. Sweeney had nearly 70 at their parent night on October 20th. And Windham Center had over 25 relatives and friends attend their Fall Carnival on October 26th and over 35 at their second parent night last week.
- At parents' requests, Windham's afterschool programs begin the first day of school and end the last day of school. Our programs are staffed by 5 Site coordinators (who work full time – 10 months a year), 29 teacher assistants, 5 door monitors and 26 teacher/tutors.

Losing the State Afterschool Grant monies would be a devastating setback for our kids, our parents, our economy and our community.